



Home Alone Safety

- The start of school is also a good time to remind children of basic safe practices. Children should not speak to strangers and, once they are home, they should not open or answer a knock at the door if an adult is not present without first determining who is there. Children should have a list of parents', neighbors' and/or relatives' phone numbers that they can call for assistance. Children should also know when it is appropriate to call 9-1-1 and 301-279-8000, the police non-emergency number.
- Parents need to carefully consider the pros and cons of having a child stay home alone before/after school. Be familiar with laws and child protective policies in your jurisdiction and, because children mature at different rates, your decision should not be based on age alone. Children should master important safety skills before staying home alone. Be sure to make and practice a home fire escape plan that includes a designated "safe" area outside where everyone will meet if the smoke alarm sounds. Unattended cooking continues to be the leading cause of home fires in Montgomery County and firefighters strongly recommend having after-school snacks on hand that do not require cooking. Children should only use kitchen appliances while under close adult supervision. Additional safety tips can be found on the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue website at mcfrs.org/mcsafe.

The law in Maryland: **Section 5-801 states:**

- (a) A person who is charged with the care of a child under the age of 8 years may not allow the child to be locked or confined in a dwelling, building, enclosure or motor vehicle while the person charged is absent and the dwelling, building, enclosure or motor vehicle is out of the sight of the person charged unless the person charged provides a reliable person at least 13 years old to remain with the child to protect the child.

Additional Tips:

- Provide your child with a key to the house, but don't label it with any identifiable information, such as your address or a label that reads "House Key." If they lose it, you don't want a stranger to show up.
- Teach your child to phone a parent or responsible adult as soon as he or she arrives home.
- Keep all doors and windows locked.
- Be sure that your child knows the home phone number and address, and your cell phone and work number(s).
- Post emergency contact information in prominent places. Make sure your children know the best way to get in touch with you, your spouse and a trusted third party, such as a neighbour or grandparent.
- Advise your children to either not answer the telephone, or to simply tell the caller that their parent is busy or can't come to the phone. Children should never tell callers that their parents aren't home.